



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

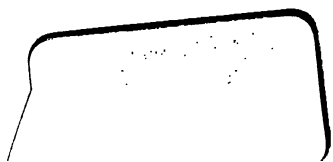
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



THE OLD MAN'S
HOME

REV W ADAMS. M. A.

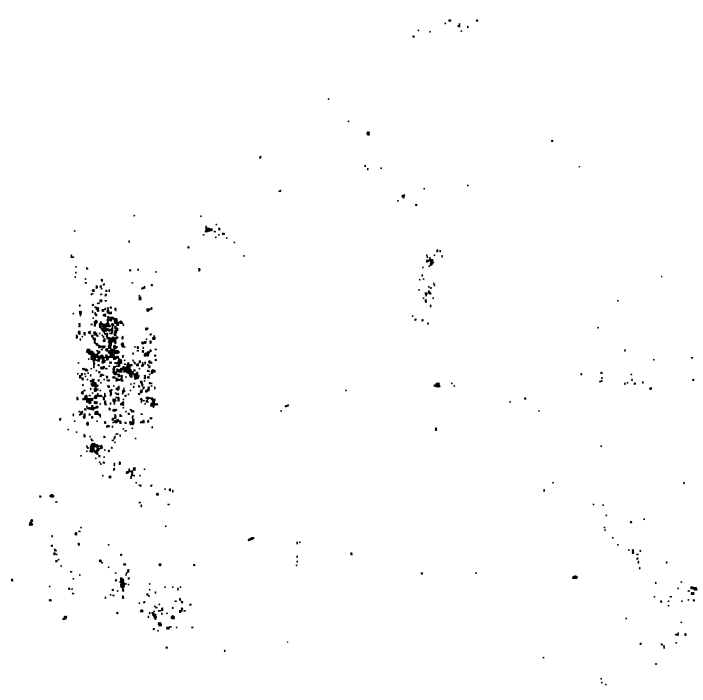






OLD

141. A. 359



THE
OLD MAN'S HOME

BY THE
REV. W. ADAMS, M.A.

LATE FELLOW OF MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD; AUTHOR OF
"THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS"

*For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a
country.*—HEB. xi. 14

New Edition, with Engravings



RIVINGTONS
London, Oxford, and Cambridge
1870

141. K. 389



CHAPTER I

EACH IN HIS HIDDEN SPHERE OF JOY OR WOE,
OUR HERMIT SPIRITS DWELL AND RANGE APART ;
OUR EYES SEE ALL AROUND IN GLOOM OR GLOW—
HUES OF THEIR OWN, FRESH BORROW'D FROM THE HEART.

Christian Year

THERE is a scene on the coast of the Isle of Wight with which I have long since become familiar, but which never fails to exercise a soothing influence on my mind. It is at the eastern extremity of the landslip. Large portions of the cliff have fallen away, and formed a dell so broken and irregular, that the ground has the appearance of having at one time been agitated by an earthquake. But Nature has only suffered the convulsion to take place, in order that afterwards she might bestow her gifts upon this favoured spot with a more unsparing hand. The wild and picturesque character of the landscape is now almost lost sight of in its richness and repose. The new soil is protected from the storms of winter by the cliff from which it has fallen, and, sloping towards the south, is open to the full warmth and

radiance of the sun. In consequence of this, the landslip has, as it were, a climate of its own ; and often, when the more exposed parts of the country still look dreary and desolate, is in the enjoyment of the blessings of an early spring. Such was the season at which I first visited it. The grey fragments of rock which lay scattered on the ground were almost hid by the luxuriance of the under-wood, and countless wild flowers were growing beneath their shade. Below, the eye rested upon a little bay, formed by the gradual advance of the sea ; and all was so calm and peaceful, that as I watched the gentle undulation of the waters, I could fancy them to be moving to and fro with a stealthy step, lest they should disturb the tranquillity of the scene.

I have said that a visit to this favoured spot never fails with me to have a soothing influence. I feel as though I were treading on enchanted ground, and the whole scene were allegorical ; for it reminds me that, in like manner, the wreck of all our earthly hopes and plans may but lay open our hearts to the influence of a warmer sunshine, and enrich them with flowers which the storms of life have no longer power to destroy. But I cannot now tell whether these thoughts have their origin in the scene itself, or in an incident that occurred the first time I visited it.

It was on the evening of the 18th of April, 1843. I had been long gazing upon it, and had imagined that I was alone, when my attention was arrested by a sigh from some one near me. I turned round, and saw a venerable old man seated upon a fragment of the fallen cliff, beneath which the violets were very thickly clustering. His hair was white as silver; his face deeply furrowed, and yet pre-*va*ded by a general expression of childish simplicity, which formed a strong contrast to the lines which must have been indented upon it by care and suffering, no less than the lapse of years. I cannot recall the words of the chance observation which I addressed to him: but it related to the lateness and inclemency of the season, and I was at once struck by the singularity of his reply. "Yes, yes," he said musingly, "the winter has indeed been very long and dreary; and yet it has been gladdened, from time to time, by glimpses of the coming spring."

I now observed him more closely. There was a strangeness in his dress which first excited my suspicion, and I fancied that I could detect a restlessness in his light blue eye which spoke of a mind that had gone astray. "Old man," I said, "you seem tired; have you come from far?"

"Ah, woe is me," he replied, in the same melancholy

tone as before; "I have indeed travelled a long and solitary journey; and at times I am weary, very weary; but my resting-place now must be near at hand."

"And whither, then," I asked, "are you going?"

"Home, sir, home," he replied; and while his voice lost its sadness, his face seemed to brighten, and his eye grow steady at the thought; "I hope and believe that I am going home."

I now imagined that I had judged him hastily, and that the answers which I had ascribed to a wandering intellect proceeded in truth from depth of religious feeling. In order to ascertain this, I asked: "Have you been long a traveller?"

"Fourscore and thirteen years," he replied; and observing my look of assumed wonder, he repeated a second time, more slowly and sadly than before, "Fourscore and thirteen years."

"The home," I said, "must be very far off that requires so long a journey."

"Nay, nay, kind sir, do not speak thus," he answered: "our home is never far off; and I might perhaps have arrived at it years and years ago. But often during the early spring I stopped to gather the flowers that grew beneath my feet; and once I laid me down and fell asleep upon the way. And so more than fourscore and

thirteen years have been wanted to bring me to the home which many reach in a few days. Alas! all whom I love most dearly have long since passed me on the road, and I am now left to finish my journey alone."

During this reply, I had become altogether ashamed of my former suspicion, and I now looked into the old man's face with a feeling of reverence and love. The features were unchanged; but instead of the childish expression which I had before observed, I believed them to be brightened with the heavenliness of the second childhood, while the restlessness of the light blue eye only spoke to me of an imagination which loved to wander amid the treasures of the unseen world. I purposely, however, continued the conversation under the same metaphor as before. "You have not then," I said, "been always a solitary traveller?"

"Ah, no," he replied: "for a few years a dear wife was walking step by step at my side; and there were little children, too, who were just beginning to follow us. And I was so happy then, that I sometimes forgot we were but travellers, and fancied that I had found a home. But my wife, sir, never forgot it. She would again and again remind me that 'we must so live together in this life, that in the world to come we might have life everlasting.' They are words that I scarcely regarded at the

time, but I love to repeat them now. They speak to me of meeting her again at the end of our journey."

"And have all your children left you?" I asked.

"All, all," he replied. "My wife took them with her when she went away. She stayed with me, sir, but seven years, and left me on the very day on which she came. It seems strange now that I could have lived with them day after day without a thought that they were so near their journey's end, while I should travel onward so many winters alone. It is now sixty years since they all went home, and have been waiting for me there. But, sir, I often think that the time, which has seemed so long and dreary to me, has passed away like a few short hours to them."

"And are you sure, then," I said, "that they are all gone home?" It was a thoughtless question, and I repented the words almost before they were spoken. The tears rose quickly in the old man's eyes and his voice trembled with emotion, as he replied: "Oh! sir, do not bid me doubt it. Surely, every one of them is gone home; one, at least, of the number is undoubtedly there; and they all went away together, as though they were travelling to the same place; besides, sir, my wife was constantly speaking to them of their home; and would not their journey as well as my own have been pro-

longed, if their home had not been ready for them? And when I think of them I always think of home; am I not, then, right in believing that all of them are there?"

There were allusions in this answer which I did not at the time understand; but the old man's grief was too sacred for me to intrude further upon it. I felt, also, that any words of my own would be too feeble to calm the agitation which my thoughtless observation had caused. I merely repeated a passage from holy Scripture, in reply, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours."

The old man's face again brightened, and as he wiped away the tears, he added, "And 'Blessed,' also, 'are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.' There is not only a blessing for those who have been taken to their rest, but there is the image of that blessing to cheer the old man who is left to pursue his solitary journey."

At this moment, the sun, which had been obscured by a passing cloud, suddenly shone forth, and its rays were reflected by a path of gold in the silent waters. The old man pointed to it with a quiet smile: the change was in such harmony with his own thoughts, that I do not wonder at the metaphor it suggested to him. "There," said he, "is the blessing of the mourner! See! how it

shines down from the heaven above, and gilds with its radiance the dreary sea of life."

"True," I replied; "and the sea of life would be no longer dreary, if it were not for the passing clouds which at times keep back from it the light of Heaven." His immediate answer to this observation proved the image, which he had employed, to be one long familiar to his own mind. "There are indeed clouds," he said, "but they are never in Heaven; they hover very near the earth; and it is only because our sight is so dim and indistinct that they seem to be in the sky."

A silence of some minutes followed this remark. I was, in truth, anxious that the old man should pursue the metaphor farther. But the gleam of light passed away as the sun sunk behind the western hills. His feelings appeared to undergo a corresponding change, and he exclaimed, hastily, "The day is fast drawing to a close; and the night must be near at hand: I must hasten onward on my journey.—Come, kind sir, and I will show you where my friends are waiting for me."

I was wondering whether he now spoke metaphorically or not, when my thoughts were suddenly turned into a new channel, and my former painful suspicions returned. As the old man leant upon his staff, his wrists became exposed to view, and I saw that they were marked with

deep blue lines, which could only have been caused by the galling of a chain in former years.

The poor wanderer observed the look I gave them. A sudden flush of shame overspread his countenance, and he hurriedly drew down his garment to conceal them. It was, however, but a momentary impulse; he again exposed them to my view, and himself gazed sadly upon them as he said, "Why should I try to hide them, when they are left there to remind me constantly of my true condition? For in times past I have borne the pressure of more wearing bonds than those; and though I have been released from them now, no one can tell how dark and deep is the stain that they have left upon the soul." Something more he added, but his eye was turned meekly towards Heaven, and it was only from the movement of his lips that I fancied I could trace the words of the prayer, "Though we be tied and bound with the chain of our sins, yet let the pitifulness of thy great mercy loose us."

He now began to move slowly forward. The ground was rough and uneven, and his step so very feeble, that I expected every instant to see him fall. He struck his foot against a stone, and I sprang forward to his assistance. "Thank you, kind sir," he said, in his quiet way; "but do not fear for me; my own frail limbs could not

support me for an instant : but I have a staff on which I lean ; and though I may stumble at times, I cannot fall."

Again I was in doubt whether to interpret his words literally or not ; but my belief now was that the old man almost unconsciously used the language of allegory. Long habit had so taught him to blend together the seen and the unseen world, that he could not separate them. Life was to him a mirror, and in the passing objects of sight and sense, he never failed to recognise the images of spiritual things.



CHAPTER II

SO WANDERERS, EVER FOND AND TRUE,
LOOK HOMEWARD THROUGH THE EVENING SKY,
WITHOUT A STREAK OF HEAVEN'S SOFT BLUE,
TO AID AFFECTION'S DREAMING EYE.

Christian Year

AT the conclusion of the last chapter I gave the opinion that I formed of the old man from the brief conversation I myself had with him. The following incident cast, as it were, a shadow upon it, and robbed it of its brightness, but did not really alter it. My intercourse with him was brought to a sudden and painful conclusion. It was at my persuasion that he crossed a stile which separated the wild scenery of the landslip from the public road leading to the little village of B——. I thought it would be easier for him to walk along the more beaten track. He had yielded with apparent reluctance to my request. His unwillingness appeared to proceed from instinct rather than reason. It may in part have arisen from a kind of natural sympathy which attracted him to that wild luxuriant spot; in part from

an unconscious dread of the danger to which he actually became exposed. He simply said, "This smooth way was not made for the like of me, kind sir; but, under your protection, I will venture along it."

Alas! I little thought of the kind of protection he required. We had advanced but a few hundred yards, and had just reached the summit of the hill which commanded the first view of the village church. The old man had paused for a little while, and appeared to gaze upon it with a feeling of the most intense interest; I was afraid, even by a passing question, to interrupt the quiet current of his thoughts; when the silence was suddenly broken by the creaking of a cart-wheel, which grated harshly on my ear; and almost before I could look round, I heard a voice of rude triumph behind me, crying out, "There he is—there he is—there goes the old boy! Stop him, stop him, sir! he is mad."

I have no heart to describe the scene that followed: the poor wanderer shuffled forward, with a nervous hurried step; but in a few seconds the cart was at his side; the driver immediately jumped out, and seizing him by the collar, with many a rude word and coarse jest, tried to force him to enter it. For a moment, surprise and indignation deprived me of speech, for I had begun to regard the old man with such a feeling of reverent love,



that it almost seemed to me like a profanation of holy ground. When, however, he turned his eyes towards me, with an imploring look, I recovered myself sufficiently to demand by what authority he dared thus molest an inoffensive traveller on his journey. In my inmost heart I dreaded the answer I should probably receive; neither was my foreboding wrong; the man laughed rudely as he replied, "He has been mad, quite mad, for more than fifty years; he escaped this morning from the Asylum, and one of the keepers has been with me all day long scouring the country in search of him."

It was in vain that I sought a pretext for disbelieving the truth of the story. I could not help feeling that it did but confirm a suspicion which, in spite of myself, had kept crossing my own mind: for the bright colouring which was shed by faith on the thoughts and words of the old man was not alone a sufficient evidence that they were under the guidance of reason. Yet, of one thing, at least, I felt sure, that, whatever were the state of his intellect, it could be no imaginary cause that now so strongly moved him. My heart bled for him as I listened to the pathetic earnestness with which he implored the protection that I was unable to afford. He even forgot to use the language of metaphor in the agony of his grief. "Indeed, indeed, sir," he said, "they call me mad,

but do not believe them, for I am not mad now. There, there," he added, pointing towards the church, "my wife and children are waiting for me. It was on this very day that they went away, and we have now been parted sixty years. I have travelled very far to join them once again before I die. Oh, have pity upon me. I only ask for one little half hour, that I may go on in peace to the end of my journey."

Large drops of moisture trembled on his forehead as he uttered these words; his whole face became convulsed with emotion, and he clung with such intensity to my garment, that his rude assailant tried in vain to unloose his grasp. The man himself was evidently frightened by the agitation which his own violence had caused, and appeared doubtful how to proceed, when the scene was fortunately interrupted by the arrival of his companion.

He was the keeper who had been sent from the Asylum with the cart, but had left it in order to search the pathway which led through the landslip. His look and manner afforded a striking contrast to those of the first comer, who proved to be merely the owner of the vehicle, which had been hired for the occasion. Immediately on his arrival, he reprimanded him for his rude treatment of the old man, and insisted on his returning to the cart, and desisting from all further interference.

My hopes were greatly raised by this, and I flattered myself I should now have little difficulty in obtaining for the poor wanderer the indulgence which he sought. But I soon found my mistake, and, under the irritated feelings of the moment, almost preferred the rude conduct of the first comer to the quiet determination with which his companion listened to my request.

He merely smiled at the account I gave of my own interview with the old man; and when I suggested that it contained no evidence of insanity, shook his head and replied, "You do not know poor Robin. His notions about home are the peculiar feature of his madness; but you are not the first person that has been deceived by them."

He spoke in a low tone, as though he was anxious not to be overheard. But the precaution seemed unnecessary; for, though the old man had mechanically retained his grasp on my garments, he was now looking eagerly towards the village church, and I could see, from the expression of his countenance, that his thoughts had passed away from the scene around him.

When I found my arguments of no avail, I changed my ground, and besought as a favour that he would make the trial of letting the old man proceed to the end of his journey, and trust to his promise to return quietly from

thence. "Sir," he replied, in a louder voice, "I should have no more hesitation in trusting the word of poor Robin than your own. He never deceived me; and, under ordinary circumstances, I would at once grant his request; but the hour is late, and, as it is, the night will close in upon us before we can get back to the town of N——. The responsibility will rest upon me, if mischief should arise from any additional delay. I am sure Robin himself would not desire it." As he said this he turned towards the old man; but his countenance was unchanged, his eye still fixed upon the church, and he either had not heard the words at all, or they had failed to convey any distinct impression to his mind.

After a pause, I again renewed my entreaties, urging that it would at least be a better plan than having recourse to violence, which must eventually produce a far more serious delay. "Of course," said the attendant, "anything is better than having recourse to violence." "Then," said I, "you accede to my request?" "Only," replied he, with a provoking smile, "in case all other methods fail; but as the delay would be a real inconvenience to us, you must permit me first to try my powers of persuasion. Let me now beg of you, whatever surprise you may feel, to be careful to express none." He again lowered his voice as he said these words, and,

in spite of the dislike inspired by the self-confidence of his manner, and of other stronger emotions, my curiosity was excited to know how he would proceed. He placed himself opposite to the old man, so as to intercept his view of the village, and then, having fixed his eye calmly and stedfastly upon him, with an appearance of real interest, thus soothingly addressed him:—"I would gladly go on with you Robin; but am sure you are under some mistake. Your wife and children cannot be in yonder village,—they are not there, they are at home. Come quietly with me now, and perhaps this evening you may go home also."

These simple words touched some hidden chord in the old man's heart, and their effect was almost magical. All other feelings passed away, and I forgot the presence of his companions, as I watched the change which they produced. His features became composed, his hand relaxed its hold, and his voice resumed its former tranquil tone as he slowly repeated: "They are not there, they are at home; they are not there, they are at home. True, very true, they are not there, they are at home."

Presently he raised his eyes to Heaven, and the attendants, no less than myself, were overawed by the solemnity of his manner. There was a silence of a few seconds, during which he seemed to listen intently; and then, as

though he had heard some echo from above, which confirmed the hope that had been held out to him, he confidently added: "And I also shall go home,—and this very evening I shall be there."

While I was still pondering on these words, the old man had of his own accord quietly placed himself in the cart, and his companions had seated themselves by his side. They were on the point of driving off before the thought occurred to me of offering him money. I drew out my purse, half expecting him to refuse the proffered gift; and it was with a strong feeling of disappointment that I observed the look of satisfaction, almost amounting to eagerness, with which he took the silver from my hand. I said within myself, "Can it be, then, that the taint of covetousness is to be found in a mind from which every earthly affection seems so entirely to have been withdrawn?" But I wronged him by the thought. The money was immediately taken from him, and he resigned it to another no less gladly than he had received it from me. "It will not do," said the keeper, "to let him have it himself: he will merely give it away to the first beggar he meets. He has not the slightest notion of the real value of money. It shall be laid out for his benefit; and till then it will be safe in my keeping."

My countenance may have expressed dissatisfaction

at the change, though, in truth, I had no objection to make to it. But the old man himself interrupted me before I could reply, and said, "Do not be afraid, kind sir, whether it remain with me or him; your treasure will be safe, quite safe; it matters not now whether it remain with me or him;" and then added, in a more solemn tone, "safe 'where neither rust nor moth doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.' I will take it home with me; and when you also go home, you will find it there." And I now understood how it was for my sake that he had so gladly welcomed the gift; and I thought, too, that if in truth money had a real value at all, it must be the one which was assigned to it by him.

The men were in a hurry to depart, and I was now forced to bid adieu to the old man. He appeared so sorry to leave me, that I promised on the morrow to come and see him. I did not like to use the word Asylum, so I said at his dwelling-place. The expression at once caught his ear, and re-awakened the train of thought which my gift had interrupted for a time.

"Not in my dwelling-place," he said, "for to-morrow I shall not be there. If you see me again, kind stranger, it must be at home. May God bless you, and guide you on your way." The cart was already in motion, but he

looked back once more, and waved his hand as he said, "Good-bye, sir. Remember that we all are going home!"

They were the last words I heard him speak, and it is perhaps from that cause that they made so strong an impression on my mind; for often since then, when I have been tempted to wander from the right path, or to murmur as I walked along it, I have thought upon the old man's parting warning, and asked myself the question, "Am I not going home?"



CHAPTER III

TWO WORLDS ARE OURS: 'TIS ONLY SIN
FORBIDS US TO DESCRIBE
THE MYSTIC HEAVEN AND EARTH WITHIN,
PLAIN AS THE SEA AND SKY.

Christian Fear

VERY early on the following morning I proceeded on foot to the town of N——. The scenery through which I passed was rich and beautiful, but it was lost upon me at the time: for there were busy thoughts within, which would not suffer my eye to rest on any external object. I was on my way to visit the old man, and had a presentiment, almost amounting to conviction, that I should not find him alive. The words, “I also shall go home, and this very evening I shall be there,” in spite of myself, kept recurring to my mind. It was to no purpose that I endeavoured to set them aside, as part of the wanderings of a disordered intellect: there was a solemnity in the look and manner of the poor wanderer, which gave a reality to their meaning; and I

believed the shadow of the future to have been resting on his spirit at the time he spoke them.

These fears gradually increased as I approached the Asylum. At the entrance, there stood a little girl, weeping as though her heart would break. A woman, who appeared to be her mother, was trying in vain to comfort her. Her only reply to every caress, was a fresh burst of sobs and tears. The scene was so in harmony with my own thoughts, that the very instant I saw her, I guessed the cause of her sorrow. Nor was my conjecture wrong: the child had dearly loved the old man, and wept because he was no more.

The father of this girl was the superintendent of the Asylum. He also was standing by, and offered to accompany me through the building. On the way, he proved very willing to gratify my curiosity concerning the stranger who had excited in me so singular an interest. I soon found him to be an intelligent, kind-hearted man, who had entered instinctively into the thoughts and wishes of poor Robin, and yet had failed to appreciate what I may call the religion of his character. His daily familiarity with the varied forms of insanity, may in part have been the cause. He had at once regarded him as a patient labouring under a peculiar kind of mental delusion, without looking beyond. In consequence of



this, there was much in our conversation which grated harshly on my own feelings. I loved better to think of the old man, as I had first seen him, sitting in the midst of the picturesque scenery of the landslip, than confined within the gloomy walls of a pauper asylum. The close rooms through which we passed, the dull tones of the superintendent's voice, his conviction of poor Robin's insanity, and even the compassionate interest with which he spoke of him, all interfered with the brightness of the image which my own mind had previously formed. It would have been more in harmony with my thoughts, to have heard from the child who was weeping for him, the simple narrative of the old man's life: but, perhaps, the contrast in the colouring of the picture only brings out the more strongly its intrinsic beauty; and, for this reason, I will still endeavour to trace it as it was first presented to my own view.

The outline is soon drawn. Poor Robin had, for more than half a century, been an inmate of the Asylum. No one could tell from whence he had been brought there, or say anything with certainty of his previous history. It was, however, generally believed that he had known better days, but that some very heavy affliction had brought on mental derangement; and that, in consequence of this, his property had gradually gone to ruin,

until at length he was consigned to a pauper asylum. He had been placed there under a very different system of treatment from that which now prevails. It had even been thought necessary in the first instance to confine him with handcuffs and chains: and he would often struggle, in a paroxysm of passion, to set himself free. But after a few years, all the more violent symptoms of his disorder had entirely disappeared, and he became so quiet and resigned, that the physician had considered it safe to release him from his bonds, and suffer him to wander at large within the precincts of the Asylum.

"There can be no doubt of the facts, sir," continued my guide, "for the marks on poor Robin's wrists prove him to have, at one time, undergone a very rigorous confinement; and yet, when I came here, I found that he had been long in the enjoyment of comparative freedom. But it is a case that always perplexes me, when I think of it; for the general effect of harsh treatment is to render the patient more violent and intractable than before; and I cannot understand from what cause the change in poor Robin's conduct could in the first instance have arisen."

"Do you not think," I asked, "that it may have been a sign of returning reason?" He smiled at the question, as he replied, "So far from it, sir, that it was accom-

panied by a new and extraordinary delusion, which never afterwards entirely left him. He fancied that the bonds which he felt and saw were merely imaginary, and that there were other invisible chains which were the real cause of his confinement. They say, that from the time this idea once gained possession of his mind, he made no further effort to recover his freedom, but even thanked the attendants for the care they were taking of him, and became as gentle and submissive as a child." Then I remembered the metaphor which the old man had employed when the marks on his wrists had attracted my attention; and I said within myself, that it was not indeed the return of reason, but a brighter and a far holier light, which had thus shone on the poor captive, and brought peace and resignation to his soul.

After his partial release, the manners and language of Robin had soon excited observation, and strengthened the belief that he must at one time have known better days. It was not, however, till the milder system of treatment was introduced generally into the Asylum, that the full beauty of his character had developed itself. Since that time, he had gradually won the affection of many of the patients, and had become an object of deep interest to all visitors. They had often come for the express purpose of talking with him. "And," continued

my conductor, "I often listened with wonder to the various interpretations they put upon his answers. Some would discover in them poetry; some, philosophy; some, religion; some, I know not what, according to the previous bias of their own minds." I inquired in what light he himself was disposed to view them? "As the wanderings of insanity," he replied; "for poor Robin was undoubtedly mad:" but presently added more thoughtfully, "yet there was something in his peculiar kind of madness which I could never exactly fathom."

I asked, whether no friend or relative had come to inquire after the old man, during the long period of his confinement? "No one," answered my conductor; "and so far it was a mercy that he had been deprived of his reason, since his madness prevented his being aware of his own solitary condition."

"How do you mean?" I said; "surely he could not help feeling that he was alone?"

"On the contrary," he replied, "he fully believed that he had a wife and children and home, and would speak, from day to day, of going to join them. Poor fellow! at one time, those who had the care of him would argue with him, and endeavour to explain to him that he was under a delusion. And the old man would soon get confused in his reasoning, and end by wringing his hands

in an agony of grief. But, since I have come here, I have thought it best to humour him in the belief; and not only forbidden all contradiction on this subject, but encouraged the attendants to talk to him about his home, and promise, that if he behaved well, he should go there very soon. You will hardly believe that I have seen tears of joy run down his cheeks at these simple words. Yet some have said, that it was almost cruel to encourage a hope which must end in disappointment at last."

"But did it end in disappointment?" I said, following my own thoughts, rather than addressing my companion. He seemed struck by the remark, and, after a pause, replied, "Why, sir, one can hardly say that it did; for the hope seemed to grow stronger, instead of weaker, as year after year passed by; and he continued in the same happy delusion to the very hour of his death. I have often thought that this imaginary home was a source of greater joy and comfort to him than the possession of any actual home could have been. When anything vexed or disturbed him he would say, that when at home he should feel it no more. When he felt dull and depressed, he would rouse himself by the thought, that he was going home. I myself have, at times, felt disposed to envy him his belief: and there was something very wonderful in the influence it gave him over his companions."

I inquired, how this belief could influence others? "Because," said he, "Robin was unable to separate the present from the future; and so it was part of his confusion of ideas to believe that those with whom he lived here would live with him in his home also. It is the only instance I have known of a person under the influence of insanity being able to impart his own views to his companions. But there seemed to be a kind of infection in the old man's madness; and more than one patient, who had previously been plunged in hopeless despondency, was gradually led to take interest in Robin's home. The effect has been so salutary with us, that I have often wished the same happy delusion could be introduced generally into other asylums."

I was following the deep train of reflection awakened by this remark, and wondering how far it might indeed be possible to graft religion on the imagination, and so to soothe and cheer the dreams of insanity with the hope of Heaven, when my conductor again resumed the conversation. "There was, sir," he said, "another delusion of the old man, scarcely less happy in its consequences than his belief about his home. You might have fancied that, from having once known better days, he would have felt bitterly the degradation of his new condition; but the whole time that he was in the Asylum he seemed

utterly unconscious that he was dependent on the parish for support."

"Do you mean," I asked, "that he imagined something had been preserved from the wreck of his own property?"

"Not in the least," he replied; "he was fully aware that his own property was gone; but he believed his daily wants to be supplied by a kind of miracle; and would often observe that he had gone on for more than fifty years without making provision for the morrow, and yet had never known what it was to be without clothing or food. Of course, sir, I did everything in my power to encourage him in the belief: but, one day, I was greatly annoyed to find a visitor, who was not aware of the old man's peculiarities, endeavouring to explain to him that the parish was bound to find him support."

"And did he," I asked, "appear much hurt at the discovery?"

"Fortunately not, sir," he replied; "and this I own quite took me by surprise, for I greatly feared, lest the consciousness of his dependence might destroy that feeling of self-respect, which, in all cases of insanity, it is so important to preserve. But Robin was rather pleased than vexed at the idea of the parish providing for him. Presently, however, he grew bewildered, and shook his

head, and said, that, after all, the parish could not provide for him beyond a single day, and that, perhaps, to-morrow he might be at home. The visitor was beginning to say something in reply: but Robin's home was with me sacred ground, and I would not suffer the argument to proceed further."

Another pause of some minutes followed, until I broke it by inquiring whether the child that I had observed at the entrance were related to the old man?

"Oh, no, sir," he replied; "little Annie is my own daughter, and many persons have wondered that I suffered her to be so constantly with him. But I consider the society of children to be very beneficial to the insane; there is something in their ways and language which they can understand far better than our own; and this was peculiarly the case with poor Robin."

"And do you suppose," I said, "that the child liked to be with him?"

"Undoubtedly," he replied; "for the choice was her own. I merely encouraged it. But Robin had an inexhaustible stock of fairy tales, which made him a great favourite with children; and Annie would sit and listen to them for hours together."

"Do you really mean," I asked, in some surprise, "that they were fairy tales?"

"Why, sir, for that matter," he answered, "poor Robin himself believed them to be true, and it was that which gave a peculiar interest to his manner of telling them. Some visitors have fancied them to be a kind of allegory: and I have often traced in the words a double meaning, of which the old man himself could hardly have been conscious. But, however this may have been, is it clear that they were connected with his particular mental delusion, from the way in which his imaginary home formed the prominent feature of every story."

I expressed a wish to hear one of them, and yet was hardly sorry when he confessed himself to be unable to comply with my request. He told me that he had only heard them in detached portions, for the patients in the Asylum were too numerous to allow him to devote as much time to poor Robin as he might otherwise have done. "But, sir," he continued, "little Annie knows them all by heart, though I am afraid to-day she is feeling too deeply the loss of her companion to be able to repeat one. There certainly was something very singular in her fondness for the old man, and I have often been perplexed at the kind of influence he had over her. She herself was sometimes a sufferer from his delusions, and yet always fancied poor Robin must be in the right, and would submit to his wishes without a murmur or

complaint. On one occasion, I myself felt called upon to interfere."

I begged him to relate the circumstance to which he referred.

"It was, sir," he said, "on Annie's ninth birth-day, in November last. I had given her in the morning a new Victoria half-crown, and she went immediately to exhibit her treasure to her friend. She looked grave and thoughtful on her return; and, when I asked what purchases she had made with her present, she confessed that the old man had begged it of her, and she had given it him. The next day I told Robin how wrong he had been to take the poor child's money. But he answered, with his usual strangeness, that he did not in the least want it, and had asked for it because he loved little Annie, and wished to do her a kindness. Now, most people would have thought that this was rather a reason for giving her a present than for taking one away. And yet the old man spoke the truth, for he knew no better. It was one of his peculiarities to imagine that he was conferring a favour when he received one."

There was a passage from Holy Scripture which this answer suggested to my mind. I remembered "the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed

to give than to receive,"* and I repeated it rather to myself than to my companion. The words, however, caught his ear, and he observed that it was very likely I had hit upon the truth; for the understanding texts of Scripture in their literal meaning was one feature of poor Robin's insanity.

With a view to pursuing the subject farther, I inquired whether the old man had restored the money.

"No, sir," replied my guide; "and this is the most provoking part of the story. I should not so much have minded if he had wished for it as a keepsake from the child; but he said he had lent it to some companion who had more need of it than himself. He did not even so much as remember his name. I told him he had much better have given it at once, as he had no chance of seeing it again. His own mind, however, was perfectly at rest about it, and he assured me that it was only lent and would undoubtedly be restored, if not sooner, at least when he went home. Of course, sir, when he touched upon his home, I did not venture to press him farther. But this was another of his delusions, which, though comparatively harmless while he was staying here, must of itself have entirely unfitted him for the management of his own affairs. He would lend all that he had to his

* Acts xx. 35.

brother paupers, and, though no one ever thought of repaying him, was just as happy as if the things remained in his own possession."

And another passage of Holy Scripture rose to my remembrance, "He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth unto the Lord: and look, what he layeth out it shall be paid him again." And I did not wonder that, with so sure a promise, the mind of poor Robin should have been at rest.

CHAPTER IV

EVER THE RICHEST, TENDEREST GLOW
SETS ROUND TH' AUTUMNAL SUN :
BUT THERE SIGHT FAILS ; NO HEART MAY KNOW
THE BLISS WHEN LIFE IS DONE.

Christian Year.

I HAVE reserved for a separate chapter that part of my conversation within the walls of the Asylum, which led to a description of the closing scene of the old man's life. I was still reluctant to admit his insanity, for it seemed to me that he had only so fully realized the presence of the unseen world, as to have forgotten altogether the things of sight in the things of faith. I inquired, therefore, of my companion, whether any more decided symptoms of madness had ever exhibited themselves than those which he had already mentioned. He appeared surprised at the question, but replied, that, though the old man was always more or less under the influence of the disorder, there undoubtedly were certain periodic returns of it, and that these uniformly occurred at the commencement of spring.

"And did these," I asked, "render him for the time violent and intractable?"

"Oh, no, sir," he answered; "ever since I have known him he has been the same quiet and inoffensive creature, and his madness used rather to assume a melancholy form. He became sad and dejected, and refused to eat, and would pass whole days together in his own solitary cell. On one occasion, my wife sent little Annie, in the hope that she might cheer him; but he would not even admit the child; he told her that his father was then with him, and that he would not talk to her. I went myself when I heard this; but, upon opening the door, I found, as I expected, that he was alone."

"Perhaps," said I, "he may have meant that he was praying to his Father in Heaven."

"It is not unlikely," he replied; "for prayer was one way in which at these seasons his madness most frequently exhibited itself. I mean," he added, observing my look of surprise, "that he did not pray like other people, but would often remain whole hours together upon his knees."

And I remembered how the prophetess Anna was said to have served God with fastings and prayers night and day, and how our blessed Lord Himself had continued a whole night in prayer to God; but I made no farther reply.

"The doctor," resumed my conductor, "considered the long solitude to be so bad for him, that for the last few days he had not suffered him to remain in his cell. It was, perhaps, this circumstance which turned the current of his thoughts into another channel, and led to his wandering from the Asylum."

I was not sorry to change the conversation, by inquiring how he had contrived his escape.

"Nay," he replied, "it is hardly fair to speak of it as an escape. We were never very strict with the old man, and often suffered him to go beyond the boundaries. On the present occasion, he had made no secret of his intention, and told one of the attendants that he was anxious to pay his wife and children a visit, and should soon be back. I have no doubt myself that he intended to keep his word; but he probably started, in the first instance, in a wrong direction, and so lost his way."

"What do you mean," I asked, "by his starting in a wrong direction? I thought you were ignorant from what part of the island he had been brought here."

"True, sir," he replied; "but Robin himself always fancied that his home lay towards the East: the little window of the cell he occupied looked in that direction; and, though it was too cold for him in the winter months, we never could persuade him to change it for one with a

southern aspect. He always said that he did not feel the cold, as long as he could see his home. Now, there is nothing but a small hamlet visible from the window, and, of course, when the old man did not return, I sent to it to inquire after him."

"And had he been there?" I said.

"No, sir," he replied; "and, after wasting many hours in the search, we at length heard that he had been seen walking along the road which led direct to the Under-cliff. It was this circumstance which enabled him to get so many miles from the Asylum before he was overtaken. But, as I said, I do not think that he intentionally misled us, but only missed his way."

Now I knew full well that the village of B—— was not the home of which the old man had spoken; but, when I remembered the agony with which he had implored to be allowed to proceed thither, I could not believe that mere accident was the cause of his journey. I resolved to return thither to prosecute my inquiries; but before I left the Asylum, asked to see the room which poor Robin had occupied.

"This is it, sir," said my conductor, as he threw open the door of a low narrow cell. "You will find it smaller and more comfortless than many others, but it is the one in which he was placed when he was first brought here;



and he had become so fond of his little window, and the view towards the East, that it would have been a mistaken kindness to force him to change it."

I scarcely heard the words of apology, for, I felt a sudden thrill as I found myself ushered thus unexpectedly into the chamber of death. The old man was lying upon his narrow bed, and a stream of light through the open window fell upon his tranquil countenance. A single glance was sufficient to tell me not only that he was indeed dead, but that his end had been full of peace. There was no convulsion of the features, and the first symptoms of decay had not yet appeared. His eyes had been left unclosed, but the wandering light was no longer there, and the smile which from time to time had been wont to play across his lips, rested quietly upon them now. The one idea that his look and posture alike conveyed to the mind was that of perfect tranquillity and repose. I felt that his long journey had at length been finished, and that the old man was at rest in his home.

My companion also seemed for a while absorbed in thought. He advanced softly to the bedside, and it was not until, with a gentle hand, he had closed the old man's eyes, that he broke the silence by observing, "Ah, sir, morning after morning I have found him lying thus,

and gazing through the open window. His sight was gradually becoming very weak from the glare of light, but he was unconscious of it himself. And it was but yesterday he told me that in a little while he should be no longer dazzled by the brightness of his home. Poor fellow! when I came into the room a few hours since, and saw his eyes so calm and motionless, though the full rays of the sun were falling upon them, I knew that he must be dead, and could not help thinking how singularly his words had come true."

There was something in the tone of voice in which this description was given, that proved the speaker to have some secret feeling of its allegorical meaning, though he himself would probably have been unable to define it.

A Bible and Prayer-Book were lying on the table by the bedside. I turned to the fly-leaf of the former, in the hope that I might at least gather from it the poor wanderer's name. There was written in it, "Susan Wakeling; the first gift of her husband, April 18th, 1776." And when I remembered the old man's great age, I conjectured that the sacred volume must formerly have been his own wedding present to his bride. I replaced it on the table, and it opened of its own accord at the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The page was much worn, as though it had not only

been often read, but many tears had fallen upon it. My eye quickly rested on the passage, "These all died in faith; . . . and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And, truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an Heavenly."* And while I read, it seemed as though I had found the text to the old man's history.

Another smaller volume was near them, which proved to be the "Christian Year." My conductor told me that it was the gift of the chaplain. For a moment I wondered at his choice, for I knew that it contained much which poor Robin must have been unable to understand. But the hymn for Septuagesima Sunday, and many others, were marked with pencil. And as my eye glanced over them, my wonder ceased. They were all in such perfect unison with the old man's own thoughts, that, however faint may have been the image which they conveyed, they could not have failed to exercise a soothing influence on his mind.

I inquired whether the chaplain used to come often to see him. "Very frequently," was the reply. "He

* Heb. xi. 13-15.

took great interest in poor Robin, and the old man was grateful for it." "It certainly was singular," he added, thoughtfully, "that on his return yesterday evening, he should have expressed so earnest a wish that the chaplain should be sent for."

"And did you refuse?" I asked.

"Fortunately not, sir," he replied. "I hesitated at first, for it was very late, and poor Robin was evidently much exhausted with the fatigue and excitement of the day. But he became so anxious about it, that my wife interceded for him, and told me she thought he would go to sleep more quietly after he had been here. I well remember now the peculiar emphasis with which the old man repeated her words, and said, 'Yes, yes, I shall doubtless go to sleep more quietly after he has been here.' It almost seemed as though he felt his end to be near at hand."

I begged to know what passed at his interview with the chaplain. My companion, however, could give me no information as to the first part of it, for the old man had desired to be left alone with him, and his wish had been at once indulged. "But," he continued, "on our return to the room, we found him looking more light and cheerful than we had ever before seen him; and when I congratulated him, he said that it was no wonder,



for a very heavy burthen had been taken away. The chaplain then told us that he proposed to administer to him the Holy Communion, and invited my wife and myself to partake of it with him. It is a point on which I have always felt doubtful, for persons in the state of poor Robin must have very indistinct views of the real nature of a sacrament. In this case the old man's own expression proved it; for, as he joined in the chaplain's request, he told us that he was going on a long journey, and might require the food to support him on the way."

"Nay," I could not help observing, "surely his journey lay through the valley of the shadow of death, and he meant that his soul would be refreshed on its passage by the body and blood of Christ, even as the body is by bread and wine."

My companion shook his head as he replied, "I believe, sir, Robin used the words literally, but the chaplain took the same view of them with yourself, and it was a point for him and not me to decide. Certainly nothing could be more grave or attentive than the old man's manner during the whole ceremony. And it may be that some glimmering of returning reason was sent to prepare him for the approach of death. Such cases are not of uncommon occurrence."

I could not help thinking that, in spiritual things, poor Robin had not needed its light; but I made no further reply; and my companion resumed his narrative.

“When the service was over, the old man merely squeezed the chaplain’s hand in parting, but did not speak to him. I also soon afterwards went away, but my wife stayed for some time longer watching by his bedside. He remained perfectly still and silent, though his eyes were open. At length she asked him whether he did not feel tired, and wish to go to sleep? And she tells me, that he smiled like a little infant, as he replied, ‘Oh no, not at all tired; for all that wearied me has been taken away.’ And then, after a pause, he added, ‘But you may wish me good night now, for I shall be asleep very soon;—and tell dear Annie I am going home.’ He spoke in so cheerful a tone, that my wife little thought they were his last words, and she left him, as she fancied, to repose. But it was a sleep from which he never woke again. Ah, sir,” he continued, “it seems a sad thing to die thus forsaken and alone; and yet, after all, many who have kind friends and relatives round their sick-beds might envy poor Robin his peaceful end. He went off so quietly at last, that those who slept in the room adjoining were not disturbed during the night by the slightest sound.

But early this morning, when I came to inquire after him, he was lying just as you now see him, quite dead!"

The deep feeling with which these words were pronounced, convinced me that he was no less touched than myself by the contemplation of the outward tranquillity of the old man's death. But who can realize the inward peace that must have been there, when the body fell asleep, and the soul was released from its long imprisonment, and carried by angels on its Homeward journey!

As we left the old man's room, I inquired whether there were many besides little Annie who mourned his loss. A smile again crossed the features of my companion, as he replied,

"There were many of the patients who loved him almost as dearly as the child herself, but I can scarcely speak of them as mourners now. A report spread among them this morning that Robin was going home; I cannot tell from what quarter it arose, but when I came to them, they crowded round me to know if it were true."

"And did you," I asked, "then tell them that he was dead?"

"Not in so many words," he replied. "I merely said that he was already gone home, and that they must not expect to see him here again. And more than one

voice exclaimed in reply, 'Happy, happy Robin, to be taken home!'

Still I observed that I had remarked on the countenance of many of the patients an expression of sadness.

"True," he answered, "for with them the transition of feeling from joy to grief is very rapid. They are not, however, sorrowing for poor Robin, but for themselves, because they have not been allowed to accompany him. There were some, in the first instance, who were very loud in their complaints; but I soothed them by saying that it was right the old man should go first, because he had been here so long." After a pause, he continued: "It is my own wish, as well as the chaplain's, that many of them should attend the funeral, for I would gladly pay this tribute of respect to Robin's memory. And yet I am half reluctant to give way to it: the remembrance of the scene might afterwards throw some gloom over the bright and happy notions which they have now formed of his home."

I replied that it might be so; "and yet," I added, "they would find in the thanksgivings and prayers of the Burial Service only the exact echo of their own joy and sorrow." And as I said this, I could not help feeling that the scene after the old man's death

had been in perfect harmony with his life, and that poor Robin was rightly rejoiced over and rightly mourned.

My account of my visit to the Asylum has already far exceeded the limits which I had assigned it. And yet, at the risk of being wearisome, I cannot refrain from adding one more fragment from my conversation within its walls, before I proceed to the more pleasant task that lies beyond. With a view to prosecuting my inquiries in the village of B——, I asked my companion whether Robin had ever dropped a hint of his former calling.

“Oh yes, sir,” was the reply; “he used to say that he had enlisted as a soldier very early in life, and had at one time been made a prisoner. I have seen the tears run down little Annie’s cheeks at the piteous tale he would tell of the way in which his enemies had bound him hand and foot, and cast him into a dark and terrible dungeon, from which he had hardly escaped with his life. But I believe the whole story to have been imaginary, and it is one that I have little difficulty in accounting for. He doubtless referred to the hardships he had endured at the period of his first imprisonment in the Asylum. No one can wonder that they should have taken so strong a hold on his imagination.”

"Did he, then," I asked, "believe that his warfare had long been at an end?"

"No, sir," he replied. "And perhaps it would be more correct to say that the treatment to which he had been exposed was the origin of his delusion, than that it accounted for it. The idea that he was liable to the attacks of some secret enemy seems from that time to have taken a fixed possession of his brain; and if any one assured him that he never could be subjected to the same ill usage again, his invariable answer was, that there was no safety for him except at home. And then he would maintain that having once enlisted, he could never cease to be a soldier, and talk of treacherous foes and long watchings and doubtful conflicts. You would have imagined him, from his conversation, to have been one who was fighting and struggling all day long, instead of the quiet, inoffensive character that he really was. But this, sir, was not all; he would fancy that every one else was a soldier also. He almost persuaded little Annie that she had enlisted in the same army with himself; and often made her sad by talking of the enemies who surrounded her, and the service she was required to perform."

I here interrupted him by asking whether the child had not been baptized. He at once perceived the drift

of the question, and replied, "I know what you mean, sir,—she was then made the soldier and servant of Christ."

"Yes," I added, "and entered into a solemn engagement to fight manfully under His banner, against sin, the world, and the Devil."

"True," he answered; "and it is very curious that it was the old man himself who first pointed out that passage in the Prayer-Book to me. I remember it struck me at the time that his peculiar notions about soldiers might, in some way, be connected with it. And I think it far from improbable; for Robin's madness seemed principally to consist in his regarding metaphors as realities, and realities as metaphors. The difference between him and ourselves would be, that he believed little Annie to be really a soldier, and not merely to be called one in the Prayer-Book."

I made no further reply, for my own thoughts grew perplexed, as I tried to determine with myself what were truths and realities, and what merely shadows and metaphors, of the things pertaining to our present existence.

CHAPTER V

OH, BLISS OF CHILD-LIKE INNOCENCE, AND LOVE
TRIED TO OLD AGE! CREATIVE POWER TO WIN
AND RAISE NEW WORLDS, WHERE HAPPY FANCIES ROVE,
FORGETTING QUITE THIS GROSSER WORLD OF SIN.

Christian Year

THE rooms of the Asylum were hot and close, and as the outer door opened, it was very pleasant to escape from them into the fresh, open air. While we did so, my mind experienced a similar kind of relief, as the plaintive accents of childhood broke in on my prolonged conversation with the superintendent.

In spite of the interest I took in his narrative itself, it was with a feeling of oppression that I had listened to it; and there was something very refreshing in the sudden change. The sounds which I now heard proceeded from little Annie. She was standing on the threshold, just as I had seen her when I entered, except that her grief was of a less quiet character than before, and something of impatience seemed to be mingled with it.



"It is of no use," said her mother, as we approached; "the poor child will fret herself into a fever, and I cannot persuade her to come away. She does nothing but beg and entreat to be allowed to see poor Robin again. I really believe it will be the best way to take her to his cell."

"It must not be," replied her husband; "she has no idea of what death really is; and the sight of the body would fill her mind with strange fancies, and perhaps do her serious harm; for she herself is but a poor weakly thing. You know I never refused her permission to visit him while he was alive, but I cannot suffer it now. It is singular," he added, turning to me with a look of vexation, "that I should have found less difficulty in quieting the complaints of all the mourners for poor Robin within the Asylum than in soothing the grief of my own little girl. I do not like to treat her with severity, and yet without it I see no hope of getting her way."

All that I had heard of the child inspired me with a lively compassion for her; and I asked to be allowed to try my powers of persuasion. Permission was readily granted; and I instinctively had recourse to the old man's last message, as the easiest way of gaining access to her heart. "Annie," I said gently, "do you know where

your friend is gone?" The simple question checked her sobs, and she looked timidly in my face, but made no reply. "Poor Annie!" I continued; "and did he indeed leave you without telling you whither he was going?"

"Home, sir, home!" she replied; and the accent, no less than the words, recalled to my mind the child-like old man: "he often told me that he was going home."

"True," I replied; "and he is gone home now. Do you really wish to see him again?" She was silent; but the look of affection that beamed on every feature was a sufficient answer; so I continued: "And if you do see him again, Annie, where will it be?" Her voice faltered, as she repeated the words, "At home;" and she again burst into tears.

"Yes, Annie," I said, after a short pause, "you cannot see him here, because he is gone away. He is now happy in the enjoyment of his home, and you must wait till you can go to him there. But, perhaps, your home is different from his. Is it so, Annie?"

"Oh, no," she answered, with unexpected earnestness; "we are all children of the same Father, and all travel to the same Home—that is," she added, looking down, and colouring deeply, "if we are careful to keep in the path that leads to it."

"And what path is that, Annie?"

"The path of trustful obedience, and quiet faith, and holy love," was her immediate reply.

I knew at once that the words were not her own, but that she spoke from memory, and that I had accidentally led her to one of the old man's allegories. I was anxious for my own sake to hear more of it, and it seemed to me that it might be good for her own sorrow to turn her thoughts for a little while into this channel: so I continued: "And is it a pleasant path, Annie, that leads us home?"

"It is an up-hill path," she said; "but as we walk along it, we can, if we will, awake soft notes of music beneath our feet, and there are whispering winds to cheer us on our way."

"And what, Annie," I asked, "do you mean by the soft music and the whispering wind?"

"The soft music is prayer," she replied, "and the whispering wind, the Holy Spirit of God."

"And can we," I said, "have the soft music without the whispering wind? I mean, can we pray without the assistance of God's Holy Spirit?" But there was no need for me to have explained the question; the language of allegory was most familiar to the mind of the child, and she had recourse to it in her reply.

"No, sir," she said, "for the spirit of harmony dwells

in the breeze; and it is the wind alone that gives life to the music, and bears it upward from earth to Heaven."

I cannot tell how far she realized the deep meaning of these words, for I did not venture to examine her upon them. I was afraid lest I should only render indistinct the image which they conveyed to her mind, by touching the colours with an unskilful hand.

Presently I resumed:—"It must, Annie, I think, be a pleasant path along which the wind thus murmurs, and the music plays!"

"It is a pleasant path," she replied, "and yet it is very thickly covered with thorns." "But," she added and from the smile which for a moment lit up her countenance, it seemed as though this were the metaphor which pleased her best, "They are all magic thorns; and if we look upward to the clear, blue sky, and tread firmly upon them, they keep changing into flowers."

"And is there not another path," I said, venturing to guess at the conclusion of the allegory, "which leads away from home, and along which the flowers, as you tread upon them, keep changing into thorns?"

But I was wrong in my conjecture, for she looked perplexed, and replied, "I do not know, sir, about the other paths; the old man never used to talk to me but of one." And I felt ashamed of my question, as I said

within myself, "Oh, happy child, to know as yet but one path; and happy teacher, to have so shared the innocency of childhood as to have spoken to her but of one!"

Presently, however, she continued, as though she observed my confusion: "But, sir, he said there were flowers which grow by the way-side. When the wind blows softly upon them they perfume the air; and their fragrance is very sweet and pleasant to those who pass them by; but if we stop to gather them, then they become magic flowers, and keep changing into thorns. And do you know, sir, why it is so?"

"Not exactly," I replied; "I should like you to explain it to me."

"Because, sir," she said, "when we gather them, we stoop down, and turn our eyes towards the earth, instead of gazing upward on the clear, blue sky."

"But, Annie," I observed, "you have not yet told me what are the flowers which we gather, or the thorns on which we tread."

"The thorns," she replied, "are the trials and afflictions which God sends us; the flowers are the pleasures and amusements which we make choice of ourselves."

"Then, Annie," I said, "the children who gather the magic flowers are those who follow their own will; while

those who tread upon the magic thorns are such as submit themselves quietly to the will of God."

Her countenance became grave, and I saw that she already guessed my meaning. I thought her mind was now sufficiently prepared to allow me to apply directly to her own case the old man's allegory; and it seemed as though his spirit were resting upon me while I did so, and I used almost unconsciously the language of metaphor.

"Annie," I continued, "a very sharp and piercing thorn was but yesterday placed in your path. Your foot is young and tender, and I do not wonder that you should shrink from treading upon it." She trembled violently at this direct allusion to her grief, and yet looked anxiously in my face, as though she wished me to say more. My own voice began to falter, and I could only add, "But, believe me, your kind friend did not deceive you; the thorn of affliction lies on the path homewards; and if you have but courage to walk quietly on, there is none that with greater certainty will change into a flower. Go, Annie, and awaken the soft music, and you will be cheered by the whispering wind."

One by one the tears trickled down her cheek, as she turned to her mother, and said, "Forgive me for my impatience; I am ready now, dearest mother, to accom-

pany you home ; or I will go home directly myself, and you shall follow me." She did not trust herself to pause an instant, or make any further reply, but expressed her gratitude to me by a look, and at once hastened away : and while she went, so vivid was the impression which the allegory had made on my own mind, that the wind which played with her garments seemed to possess some holy charm, and I could fancy that I was listening to strains of music, in the soft echo of her receding steps.

The mother also was silent ; but there was no mistaking the expression of her countenance. The subdued smile on her lips, and the bright tears that trembled in her eyes, as she raised them to Heaven, told me that she was following the same solemn train of thought with myself, and treasuring yet more deeply in her heart the sayings of her child.

There was a pause of some seconds, and the sound of little Annie's footsteps had just died away, when the stillness was again broken by her father's voice. " You were fortunate, sir," he said, " in leading her to the story of the homeward path ; many visitors have considered it the most beautiful of all that the old man told. It was a great favourite with the child. I have often heard her repeating detached portions of it to herself, though I was not aware that she had found in them

so deep a meaning.—It is strange, very strange,” he added thoughtfully, “for I cannot even now tell who could have explained them to her.” I also have often looked back with wonder on the answers of the child. But there is a passage from Holy Scripture, which seems to be their best interpreter, and they never fail to recall it to my mind; “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”*

Poor Annie! My conversation with her gave a ray of brightness to a visit which otherwise had in it enough of gloom. Nor has this feeling been in any way changed by the early death of the child. There is still peace and joy in every thought connected with her, though within a few months of my first visit to the Asylum little Annie was laid in her quiet grave. She laboured but one short hour in the vine-yard, and then was taken to the same home with the old man who had borne so long and so patiently all the burthen and heat of the day. Yet my own heart was a witness that even her little hour of labour had not been without its fruit.

A romantic story was told concerning the cause of her death. It was said that she had never recovered

* Luke x. 21.

the loss of her friend, but gradually pined away in consequence of it, and at length died of a broken heart. But I believed not the tale; for little Annie did not sorrow as those without hope; and though, perhaps, the cord of affection, that united her so closely to the old man, may have hastened her progress to the home to which he was gone, I do not think that her bereavement was the cause of her death. I had left her with the impression that she was not long for this world. I cannot exactly describe from whence this feeling arose. It was not merely because her cheek was wan, and her complexion delicate, and her little heart seemed to beat with too eager emotion for the frail prison in which it was confined; but there was something in her voice, look, and manner which kept reminding me of the world of spirits; as though, in all her youth and innocence, she were walking on its very borders, and her gentle form might at any moment fade into the mist and vanish from my view.

The more I reflected on this, the more sure I became that little Annie had lived her time, and that no sudden shock had broken prematurely the thread of life. I thought that this assurance might afford some comfort to her parents in their heavy affliction; for Annie was an only daughter. But when I called upon them, the

mother alone was at home; and I soon found that she needed no consolation which I could afford her. She had her own secret store of treasure in every word that had fallen from her darling child. I shall never forget the look with which she said to me, "Ah, sir, I understood very little of her words while she was alive; but the moment she was gone, it seemed as though a light were shining upon them from another world, and I can read them plainly now." And then, after a pause, she added, "Do you remember, sir, on the very day you were with us, how she said, 'I will go home directly myself, and you shall follow me?'" I remembered it well; and she saw from my countenance that I guessed her meaning. "Yes," she continued, as, in spite of every effort to suppress it, the big tear rolled down her cheek, "it was in order that her father and myself might learn to follow her, that little Annie was taken Home. He too, sir, has become since then an altered man."

A silent pressure of the hand was my only reply for I felt that the afflicted mother had learnt more truly than I could teach her the lesson which was to be gathered from the death of her child.

CHAPTER VI

GENTLY ALONG THE VALE OF TEARS
LEAD ME FROM TABOR'S SUNBRIGHT STEEP ;
LET ME NOT GRUDGE A FEW SHORT YEARS
WITH THEE TOWARD HEAVEN TO WALK AND WEEP.

BUT, OH ! MOST HAPPY, SHOULD THY CALL,
THY WELCOME CALL, AT LAST BE GIVEN—
“COME, WHERE THOU LONG HAST STORED THY ALL !
COME, SEE THY PLACE PREPARED IN HEAVEN !”

Christian Year

THE recollection of little Annie has made me wander from my story, and I must now hasten to bring it to a conclusion. I left the Asylum, pondering deeply on the things I had heard and seen. My heart was sad within me; for I could not help giving way to a feeling of compassionate sorrow as I thought of the old man's solitary lot.

His past history seemed, indeed, to be lost in almost hopeless oblivion. But I knew that he must have been crushed and broken down by some terrible calamity in early youth; that he had been awakened from the stupor which it produced to the stern reality of bonds

and chains, and then been doomed to a dull unvaried captivity, not for days, weeks, or months, but for a long period of more than fifty years. Thus Reason kept drawing a melancholy picture of one without home, without friends, dependent on charity for his daily bread, whose whole existence was a dreary void, with no employment to beguile his thoughts, no hope to cheer him on his way. It needed only the recollection of that peculiar solitude of mind, which is almost the certain offspring of insanity, to complete its gloom.

And yet, after all, it was my own infirmity which made me sad; for, when I had strength to gaze on the same picture with the eye of faith, bright and beautiful were the images that I saw. I then perceived that he was not without home, for his home was in the land of spirits beyond the grave; he was not without friends, for his wife and children were waiting for him there; while he remained upon earth, he was not dependent, for he felt his daily wants to be supplied by a Father's care; he never, for a single instant, was without occupation, for he had a long warfare to accomplish, a distant journey to perform; and still less was he uncheered by the blessing of hope, for he was able to rest in humble trust on his Saviour's promise, and go on, day after day, laying up treasures for himself, which neither moth nor

rust could corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Out of the loneliness caused by his affliction he had created a new world for himself, or rather, he had been drawn by it to live in that world which, though unseen, God has really created for us all. And surely to him life could never have been dull and unvaried, while he was able to trace the types and emblems of spiritual things alike in the passing gleams of sunshine, and in the dark shadows that rested upon his path !

Mingled with these conflicting emotions, the question from time to time arose in my mind, "And was poor Robin really mad?" And again it was only my own infirmity which caused me to shrink from the reply. It is hard indeed to define madness ; and the state of his intellect probably varied from time to time. Thus it may have been almost without a cloud when little Annie was his companion. So, also, during my brief interview with him, the stillness of the evening, and the unison of his own thoughts with the surrounding scene, may have breathed a soothing influence upon his mind. And yet when I reflected calmly on that very interview, I felt that they were right in not suffering the old man to travel alone along the journey of life.

His was the second childhood ; simple, pure, and holy as the first, and yet, in his case, no less than the first,


requiring a protector's care. He spoke and thought as a child, and children could understand him : but the calm mirror of his mind quickly grew troubled in his intercourse with men, and he then lost the power of explaining his thoughts, or perhaps of himself distinguishing between the shadow and the substance, the things of sight and the things of faith. Reason had resigned her sway during the mental conflict which had been caused by his calamities ; and though peace and quietness had been restored, she never had attained sufficient vigour to resume it again. Nay more ; it may be that her lamp was the more dim and uncertain, on account of the brighter and clearer light which from that time burned unceasingly in his soul. It is possible that he was slow in observing the different shades of colour that passed across earthly objects, because to his eye one unfading colour was resting upon them all ; and that his mere intellectual faculties remained weak and palsied, because out of this very weakness he had been made strong, and he was at all times conscious of the presence of a surer support and safer guide.

And what matters it, if it were so ? Why may we not revere poor Robin, and love him, and learn from him, and yet not shrink from acknowledging that his reason had gone astray ? Surely, there is no one who

would not gladly leave the hard dull road of life, if only they could wander with him along the same bright and happy paths ! There is no one who would not give the choicest gifts of reason twice told, if only they could purchase for them the child-like faith of that simple-hearted man !

I was half sorry when my arrival at the village of B—— made me change these silent meditations for the attempt to investigate the old man's connections and history. It was not, however, mere curiosity that prompted me to do so. I was anxious, if it were possible, to save him from a pauper's grave. For a long time my inquiries were in vain. Some few, indeed, had heard of poor Robin ; for his fame, as I have said, had spread beyond the walls of the Asylum ; but the name of Wakeling was unknown to them ; and they did not believe he had ever been connected with the parish of B——. They referred me, however, to the cottage of the oldest inhabitant of the village. She was a widow, of very great age, having lived to see four generations around her. A few years since, they said she was able to speak distinctly of events that had happened more than half a century ago, but latterly her memory had become impaired.

When I mentioned to her the name of Wakeling, the



word at once awakened some recollection of the past. She twice repeated it, and added, almost mechanically, "Good and excellent people, sir, and very kind to the poor." But when I questioned her as to their occupation and history, and asked what had become of them, she shook her head, as though the thread of memory had been broken off, and she was unable to unite it again.


As a last hope, I referred directly to the spring of 1783, and inquired whether it had been marked by any particular occurrence. "Ah, sir," she replied, "much of the past is now like a dream to me, but that is a period which I never can forget." The tone of sadness in which these words were uttered, proved some deep sorrow to be connected with the remembrance of it; and on further questioning, I learnt that it was a season in which an infectious fever had raged in the village, and that whole families had been carried off by its ravages; she herself had been left an orphan. But though her recollection of the illness itself seemed as vivid as though it had occurred but yesterday, of the Wakelings she could say nothing with distinctness. It may be that her mind was too absorbed with the remembrance of her own grief to allow her to recur to that of others; or it may be that, even at the time, in the general affliction the loss of an individual, however grievous, had been scarcely

noticed, and soon forgotten. At length she seemed to grow weary of my importunity, and said, "I cannot tell who may have lived, and who may have died: you must go, sir, to the churchyard, and there you will find the only certain history of that fatal spring."

A new thought was suggested by these words, and I repaired thither in the hope that I might find that information, which I had sought in vain from the living, among the silent records of the dead.

The evening was now drawing on, and it was in truth the very hour at which but yesterday I had parted from the old man. I was alone; and as I trod, with a cautious reverence, upon the green sod, there was no sound to break the tranquillity of the scene, save the ripple of the waters at the edge of the cliff on which the churchyard stood. Their restless motion only made me feel the more deeply the stillness of the hallowed ground itself; and I thought, that if the old man had been with me, he might have found in it an apt emblem of the quiet resting-place of the dead, lying on the very borders of the sea of life, and yet untroubled by its murmuring, and sheltered from its storms.

I was not long in discovering the object which I sought. The rays of the setting sun at once directed me to a stone at the eastern extremity of the churchyard. It





was distinguished from those around by a simple cross; but in spite of the soft light that was now shed upon it, it was with difficulty that I deciphered the inscription which it bore. For not only was the tomb itself thickly covered with moss and weeds, but my own eye grew dim with tears, as one by one the few sad words revealed to me the secret of the old man's history. His restlessness during the spring, the object of his last solitary journey, and parts of his conversation with myself, which before had seemed obscure, were now fully explained. The inscription was as follows:—

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF

SUSAN, WIFE OF ROBERT WAKELING,

WHO DIED

APRIL 18, 1783, AGED 28 YEARS.

ALSO OF THEIR CHILDREN,

ALICE, AGED 6 YEARS, HENRY, AGED 5 YEARS,

AND EDWARD, AN INFANT,

WHO SURVIVED HER ONLY A FEW DAYS.

"I SHALL GO TO THEM,
BUT THEY SHALL NOT RETURN TO ME."

2 SAM. XII. 23.

There was room beneath the text from Holy Scripture for one name more, and it was there that I added the words :

ALSO OF ROBERT WAKELING,

WHO DIED

APRIL 18, 1843, AGED 93 YEARS.

They remain as a simple record that the old man was indeed united at last, in body as well as spirit, to those whom he had so dearly loved and mourned so long.





